

Will the Ghost Go West

By Douglas Kiker

WASHINGTON

Special Presidential Assistant Richard Goodwin is on vacation at Martha's Vineyard, Mass., trying to decide if he wants to drop the nom de plume of Lyndon B. Johnson and start writing, at last, under his own name.

At the moment he still is undecided, and his friends say it is 50-50 as to whether he will remain at the White House as the President's chief speechwriter and one of his major idea men or resign in the early fall. He has set Sept. 15 as a deadline for making a decision.

President Johnson has made it abundantly clear to Mr. Goodwin that he wants to keep him, but is keeping quiet while he makes his mind up.

The dogdays choice Mr. Goodwin faces is a classic one in Washington: whether, as a young man of brilliance and ability, to remain in a semi-anonymous White House role and thus retain its enormous power or to stop being somebody else's guy and strike out in quest of independent reputation. The White House is not an easy place to walk away from.

If he does leave, it will be without hard feelings on either side, for Lyndon Johnson rescued Richard Goodwin from obscure exile in the Kennedy administration and Mr. Goodwin, in turn, has served the President faithfully and well. One thing is certain, in any event—there will be no memoirs.

Mr. Goodwin was brought to the White House by Bill Moyers in those early days when the Johnson staff tried to maintain the fiction that the President personally wrote every word he uttered. He had out for a while in the Executive Office Building

Roscoe Drummond is on a brief vacation. During this period his column will be written by members of the Herald Tribune staff.

and wrote speeches just as he had written speeches for John Kennedy and Sargent Shriver in earlier days. But he and Mr. Moyers found they worked well together, and gradually they evolved into a part-time team.

Gradually Mr. Goodwin started making policy as well as writing about it. He has been especially active in civil rights and housing. He also has served as a diplomatic envoy from the Administration to the intellectual community. (Under his sponsorship, such people as Commentary magazine editor Norman Podhoretz and novelist William Styron have been brought to town for quiet, enlightening, backstairs White House visits).

His departure would create a big vacancy, for there is no one else around who writes as well under pressure as he. But simultaneously it would

also serve to dramatize the fact that the White House staff slowly is growing stronger, as more and more bright young men like Harry McPherson from the State Department and Joseph Califano from the Defense Department are added to it. Mr. Goodwin will be sorely missed, but he is not indispensable.

The President now is surrounded by the best staff he has ever had. The new members are talented and promising and the old ones have profited greatly from experience.

It remains, since the departure of Walter Jenkins, a staff without a chief. There is no one who leads and unifies its effort to serve the President, and at this time no one appears destined to assume that role.

If Mr. Goodwin leaves, Mr. Johnson will need some one new to enunciate his policies and goals for him. But the total Johnson White House staff still is stronger now than ever before, and even without a leader its efficiency can be expected to increase as time goes on.

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